BIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Grinding It Out: The Making of McDonald's

by Ray Kroc

A 52-year-old milkshake salesman builds McDonald's by out-grinding everyone - the real founding story.

BEST POINTS FROM THE BOOK

01 **Kroc was 52 when he met the McDonald brothers - and called himself an overnight success whose night lasted thirty years.**

Decades of selling paper cups and milkshake mixers were the training, not wasted time. The break came late because the preparation took that long.

02 **Nothing takes the place of persistence - not talent, not genius, not education.**

The Coolidge maxim Kroc lived by and the book's title in one line: 'grinding it out' means pressing on through debt, rivals, and setbacks when quitting would be easier.

03 **Eight Multimixer machines at one tiny burger stand told him the whole story.**

Each machine made five shakes at once, yet the San Bernardino stand needed eight to keep up. Kroc didn't see a restaurant - he saw a system the whole country would line up for.

04 **Quality, Service, Cleanliness, and Value ran everything - no exceptions.**

QSC&V was an operating mandate, not a slogan. Kroc inspected stores himself, and a staffer caught leaning heard: if you have time to lean, you have time to clean.

05 **Make the franchisee successful first, and the company gets rich second.**

Kroc wanted working owner-operators, not passive investors, charged no fat upfront fees, and took just 1.9% of sales. Operators who prospered built his chain for him.

06 **Sonneborn's insight: McDonald's was not in the hamburger business - it was in the real estate business.**

You can't build an empire on a 1.4% cut of a 15-cent hamburger. Franchise Realty Corporation bought the land, leased it to operators, and turned rent into steady income - and the lease into the hammer that enforced standards.

07 **The real product was the system: simple food, done exactly the same way, everywhere.**

A tiny menu, fries researched with potato experts until they were perfect, and Hamburger University training every operator. Any store could be copied because every step was spelled out.

08 **As long as you're green, you're growing. As soon as you're ripe, you start to rot.**

Kroc's personal motto, printed on the book itself. The moment you decide you've arrived, you stop improving - and decline begins.

09 **Let good ideas come from the front lines - none of us is as good as all of us.**

Franchisees invented the Big Mac, the Filet-O-Fish, and the Egg McMuffin. Kroc built a system strong enough to standardize everything, yet open enough to adopt a local operator's winner nationwide.

10 **You're only as good as the people you hire - so promote the grill man who earns it.**

Fred Turner started behind the Des Plaines grill and rose to run the company. Kroc, Sonneborn, and Turner: the empire was built by spotting talent early and betting the business on it.

THE BOOK, IN SHORT

Ray Kroc spent most of his life as a traveling salesman - seventeen years selling paper cups for Lily-Tulip, then, from 1937, crisscrossing the country as exclusive distributor of the Multimixer milkshake machine. That venture began with a bad deal: his old employer claimed his contract and took 60% of his business. Kroc calls it the first time he had to 'grind it out,' and credits the adversity with giving him the perseverance he would need later. He was 52, diabetic, and battle-scarred when the big break finally came.

In 1954 a small San Bernardino, California, stand run by Dick and Mac McDonald ordered eight of his Multimixers at once. Kroc flew out to see why, and found a tiny menu, low prices, spotless counters, and lines of customers served in seconds. He talked the cautious brothers into letting him franchise their name and system, and on April 15, 1955, he opened his own first restaurant in Des Plaines, Illinois.

Building the chain meant building a system. Kroc obsessed over the details - famously experimenting with potato storage and cooking until the fries matched the originals - and codified Quality, Service, Cleanliness, and Value as the law of every store. His franchise model was the reverse of his competitors': instead of gouging buyers with big upfront fees, he recruited hands-on owner-operators and took only a small percentage of sales, reasoning that McDonald's would prosper only if the man behind the counter prospered first.

The financial breakthrough came from his partner Harry Sonneborn, who told him he was not in the hamburger business but the real estate business. Through Franchise Realty Corporation (1956), McDonald's bought or leased the land under its restaurants and rented it to franchisees - creating steady income, capital for expansion, and, through the lease, the power to enforce QSC&V standards anywhere.

Kroc's tight control clashed with the McDonald brothers, who vetoed his changes and were content to stay small. In 1961 he borrowed heavily and bought them out for $2.7 million, then kept grinding: Hamburger University professionalized training, franchisees contributed the Big Mac, Filet-O-Fish, and Egg McMuffin, and the chain spread worldwide. His closing philosophy is the book's spine - persistence outranks talent, genius, and education, and as long as you're green, you're growing.

DO THIS WEEK

Do what Kroc did in Des Plaines this week. (1) Write your own short standards list - the three or four basics your work will never drop, the way QSC&V ruled McDonald's - and post it where you work. (2) Check yourself against it daily for seven days, inspecting your own 'store' the way Kroc inspected his. (3) Pick the one detail you keep tolerating - your soggy fries - and grind on it until it's right.

By Ray Kroc (with Robert Anderson), first published 1977. Read it for the true McDonald's story and proof that 52 is not too old to start.